

best friend. Both were shot in the head execution style by two teens who had been involved in an attempted murder 13 hours before using a hand gun. These last four years have been a living hell and if I can stop just one mother from living the nightmare I have had to live, then I will be happy."

Suzu of Raleigh, NC: "Last April, my growing lanky 10 yr. old sat on my lap the day after Columbine and asked me—'Why?' I had no answer. I simply held him and cried with him. I still have no answer. But I don't ever want him to ask me why I didn't do something. I will link hands with all of you on Mothers Day. Its time to take back our precious babies' childhoods."

Lori of Troy, MI: "I am scared and outraged for our children. In Michigan there is an effort to allow concealed weapons. I have had enough of the NRA and the pro gun lobby. They say the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. I hope we can change it."

Angelique of Imperial Beach, CA: "A close friend of mine once found a little boy that had been accidentally shot in the head by a friends' dads' gun. To this day she will never in a million years forget what it felt like to have that little boy tug and pull at her shirt during his last few moments alive. Had there been a trigger-lock on that firearm his life could've been saved . . . As well as so many others . . ."

RECOGNIZING THE FIRST BUY BACK OF NATIONAL DEBT IN 70 YEARS

Mr. ROBB. Mr. President, I take a moment to recognize a milestone we reached today that was simply unthinkable eight short years ago. While it has gone largely unnoticed, in my view it represents real hope for our children's future.

Today, for the first time in 70 years, we bought back part of our Nation's debt. It was a relatively small amount—\$1 billion—compared to our \$5.7 trillion debt. But at least it shows that we are willing to pay down the mortgage the federal government took out on our children's future over the last 30 years.

We hear a great deal about wasteful spending, and we need to remain vigilant to root out wasted taxpayer dollars. But in my view, the most wasteful federal spending is the money we are forced to spend on interest to support our publicly held debt—debt which represents all the tough choices we did not make. Last year, we spent nearly \$230 billion on interest payments on the debt. That compares with the roughly \$38 billion the federal government spent last year on education.

Those of us who care deeply about keeping government from spending more than it takes in need to continue to make fiscally responsible choices so we can remove the millstone of debt

from the necks of our children as quickly and responsibly as possible.

THE AFFORDABLE EDUCATION ACT

Mr. KOHL. Mr. President, I rise today as a proud cosponsor of "The Public Education Reinvestment, Re-invention, and Responsibility Act of 2000"—better known as "Three R's." I have been pleased to work with the education community in Wisconsin, as well as Senator LIEBERMAN and our other cosponsors, on this important piece of legislation. I believe that this bill represents a realistic, effective approach to improving public education—where 90% of students are educated.

We have made great strides in the past six years toward improving public education. Nearly all States now have academic standards in place. More students are taking more challenging courses. Test scores have risen slightly. Dropout rates have decreased.

In Wisconsin, educators have worked hard to help students achieve. Fourth-graders and eighth-graders are showing continued improvement on State tests in nearly every subject, particularly in science and math. Third-graders are scoring higher on reading tests. Test results show some improvement across all groups, including African American, disabled, and economically disadvantaged groups.

Unfortunately, despite all of our best efforts, we still face huge challenges in improving public schools. The most recent TIMSS study of students from 41 different countries found that many American students score far behind those in other countries. In Wisconsin, scores in math, science and writing are getting better but still need improvement. And test scores of students from low-income families, while showing some improvement, are still too low.

I strongly support the notion that the Federal government must continue to be a partner with States and local educators as we strive to improve public schools. As a nation, it is in all of our best interests to ensure that our children receive the best education possible. It is vital to their future success, and the success of our country.

However, addressing problems in education is going to take more than cosmetic reform. We are going to have to take a fresh look at the structure of Federal education programs. We need to let go of the tired partisan fighting over more spending versus block grants and take a middle ground approach that will truly help our States, school districts—and most importantly, our students.

Our "Three R's" bill does just that. It makes raising student achievement for all students—and eliminating the achievement gap between low-income and more affluent students—our top priorities. To accomplish this, our bill centers around three principles.

First, we believe that we must continue to make a stronger investment in education, and that Federal dollars must be targeted to the neediest students. A recent GAO study found that Federal education dollars are significantly more targeted to poor districts than money spent by States. Although Federal funds make up only 6–7% of all money spent on education, it is essential that we target those funds where they are needed the most.

Second, we believe that States and local school districts are in the best position to know what their educational needs are. They should be given more flexibility to determine how they will use Federal dollars to meet those needs.

Finally—and I believe this is the key component of our approach—we believe that in exchange for this increased flexibility, there must also be accountability for results. These principles are a pyramid, with accountability being the base that supports the federal government's grant of flexibility and funds.

For too long, we have seen a steady stream of Federal dollars flow to States and school districts—regardless of how well they educated their students. This has to stop. We need to reward schools that do a good job. We need to provide assistance and support to schools that are struggling to do a better job. And we need to stop subsidizing failure. Our highest priority must be educating children—not perpetuating broken systems.

I believe the "Three R's" bill is a strong starting point for taking a fresh look at public education. We need to build upon all the progress we've made, and work to address the problems we still face. This bill—by using the concepts of increased funding, targeting, flexibility—and most importantly, accountability—demonstrates how we can work with our State and local partners to make sure every child receives the highest quality education—a chance to live a successful productive life. I look forward to working with all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, as well as education groups in my State, as Congress debates ESEA in the coming months.

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Wednesday, March 8, 2000, the Federal debt stood at \$5,745,125,070,490.06 (Five trillion, seven hundred forty-five billion, one hundred twenty-five million, seventy thousand, four hundred ninety dollars and six cents).

One year ago, March 8, 1999, the Federal debt stood at \$5,651,493,000,000 (Five trillion, six hundred fifty-one billion, four hundred ninety-three million).

Five years ago, March 8, 1995, the Federal debt stood at \$4,848,282,000,000